

The Wonder and Mystery of the Incarnation

The advent of Jesus Christ into the world was His very incarnation. Jesus Christ did not cease being what He had always been—eternal God. But, He became what He was not—fully man but without sin. This is a mystery of the highest order that demands our worship of Christ, first and foremost. The Incarnation addresses the chasm between a perfect God and sinful man. How can sinners approach a thrice holy God if not through a sacrifice? And what kind of sacrifice can take away man's sin if not a perfect sacrifice which man cannot himself offer? On the other, only God can offer a perfect sacrifice since only He can bear the full and infinite wrath of God that is the penalty of man's sins. Yet, God has no need to sacrifice since He is God—perfect, holy, and without blemish whatsoever. Hence, the dilemma, but also the wonder of the incarnation. God became a perfect man. The Heidelberg Catechism explains in Q/A 12-18 this dilemma that arises from man's sin, and the only Mediator who can address it.

12. Since, then, by the righteous judgment of God we deserve temporal and eternal punishment, how may we escape this punishment and be again received into favor?

God wills that His justice be satisfied;[1] therefore, we must make full satisfaction to that justice, either by ourselves or by another.[2]

[1] Ex 20:5, 23:7; Rom 2:1-11;

[2] Isa 53:11; Rom 8:3-4.

13. Can we ourselves make this satisfaction?

Certainly not; on the contrary, we daily increase our guilt.[1]

[1] Job 9:2-3, 15:15-16; Ps 130:3; Mt 6:12, 16:26; Rom 2:4-5

14. Can any mere creature make satisfaction for us?

None; for first, God will not punish any other creature for the sin which man committed;[1] and further, no mere creature can sustain the burden of God's eternal wrath against sin and redeem others from it.[2]

[1] Ezek 18:4, 20; Heb 2:14-18.

[2] Ps 130:3; Nah 1:6

15. What kind of mediator and redeemer, then, must we seek?

One who is a true[1] and righteous man,[2] and yet more powerful than all creatures, that is, one who is also true God.[3]

[1] 1 Cor 15:21-22, 25-26; Heb 2:17.

[2] Isa 53:11; Jer 13:16; 2 Cor 5:21; Heb 7:26.

[3] Isa 7:14, 9:6; Jer 23:6; Jn 1:1; Rom 8:3-4; Heb 7:15-16.

16. Why must He be a true and righteous man?

Because the justice of God requires that the same human nature which has sinned should make satisfaction for sin; [1] but one who is himself a sinner cannot satisfy for others.[2]

[1] Rom 5:12, 15; 1 Cor 15:21; Heb 2:14-16.

[2] Isa 53:3-5; Heb 7:26-27; 1 Pt 3:18.

17. Why must He also be true God?

That by the power of His Godhead[1] He might bear in His manhood the burden of God's wrath,[2] and so obtain for[3] and restore to us righteousness and life.[4]

[1] Isa 9:5.

[2] Dt 4:24; Isa 53:8; Ps 130:3; Nah 1:6; Acts 2:24.

[3] Jn 3:16; Acts 20:28.

[4] Isa 53:5, 11; 2 Cor 5:21; 1 Jn 1:2.

18. But who now is that Mediator, who in one person is true God and also a true and righteous man?

Our Lord Jesus Christ,[1] who is freely given unto us for complete redemption and righteousness.[2]

[1] Mt 1:21-23; Lk 2:11; 1 Tim 2:5, 3:16.

[2] Acts 4:12; 1 Cor 1:30.

